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3 OF 3
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SUGGESTED
FOR MATURE
READERS

GAZ AND GRUING

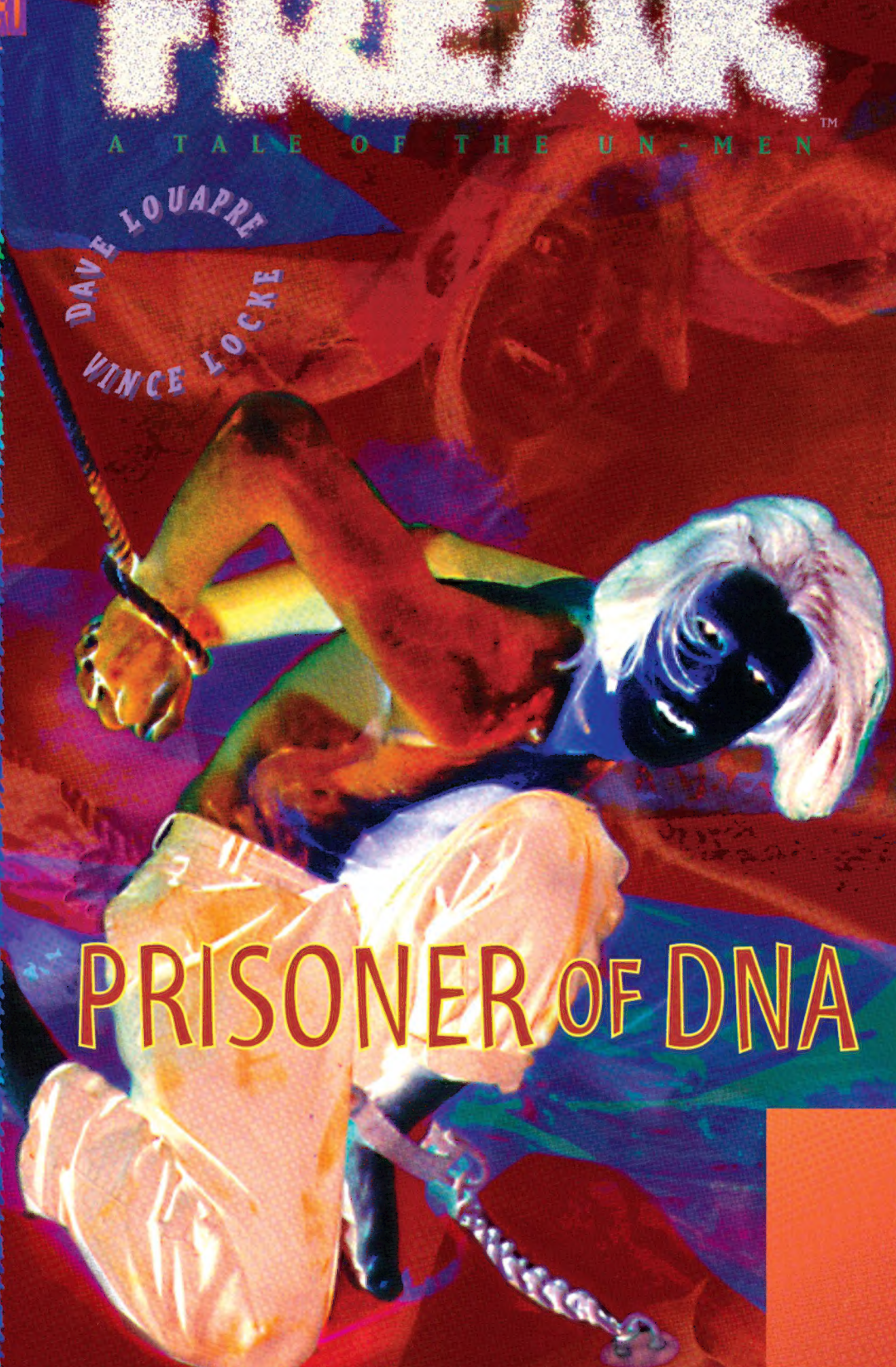
A M E R I C A N

PRISONER

A T A L E O F T H E U N - M E N TM

DAVE LOUAPRE
VINCE LOCKE

PRISONER OF DNA



A M E R I C A N

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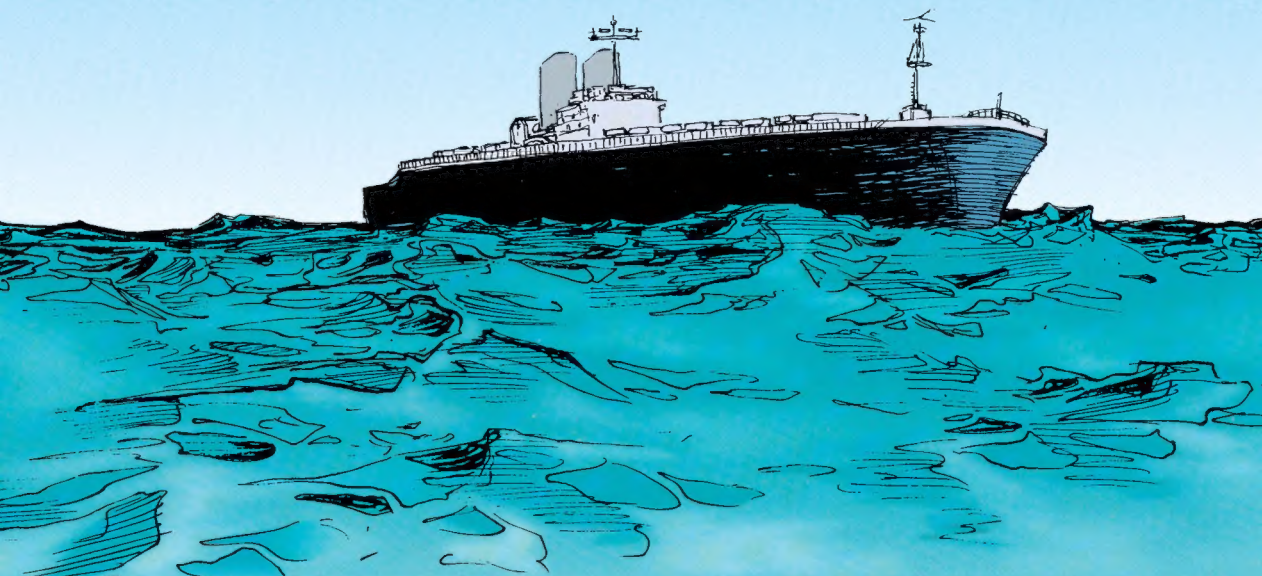
CHAPTER THREE: **BLUE SKIES OF PURGATORY**

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"We are all damned," she said,
"but some of us have taken
off our blindfolds and see
that there's nothing to see.
It's a kind of salvation."

Flannery O'Connor, from
"Good Country People"



WAITING.

ELEVEN MISERABLE DAYS I WAITED
IN THE CHURNING BELLY OF THAT
AWFUL SHIP, LIKE A FETUS GOING
CRAZY WITH CABIN FEVER.



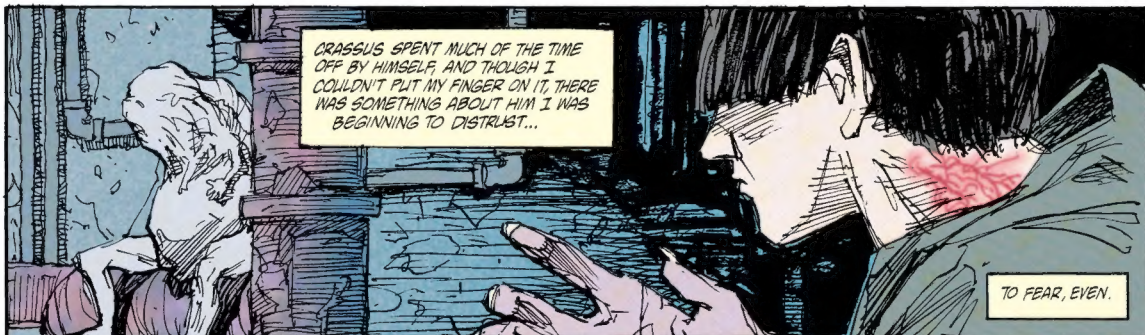
I WAS BECOMING OBSESSED
WITH THE METAMORPHOSIS--
PERVERSELY FASCINATED
WITH MY OWN MUTATING BODY.



IT WAS THE SAME FASCINATION I'D FELT
IN THE CARNIVAL FUNHOUSE WHEN I'D STAND
IN FRONT OF THOSE TWISTED MIRRORS AND
WATCH MYSELF CONTORT LIKE HUMAN TAFFY.

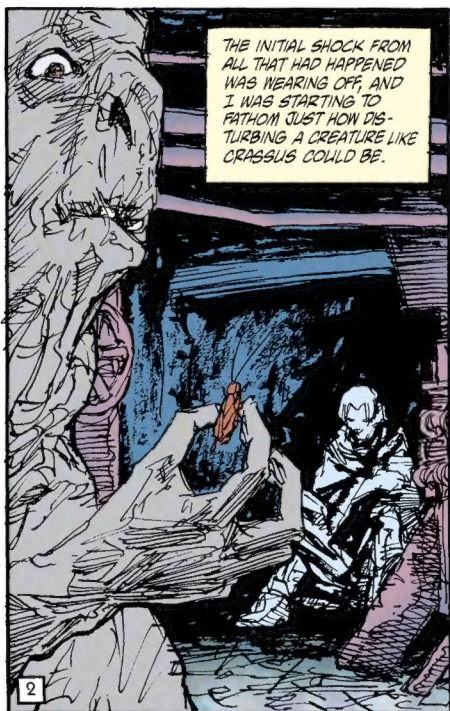


CRASSUS SPENT MUCH OF THE TIME
OFF BY HIMSELF, AND THOUGH I
COULDN'T PUT MY FINGER ON IT, THERE
WAS SOMETHING ABOUT HIM I WAS
BEGINNING TO DISTRUST...



TO FEAR, EVEN.

THE INITIAL SHOCK FROM
ALL THAT HAD HAPPENED
WAS WEARING OFF, AND
I WAS STARTING TO
FATHOM JUST HOW DIS-
TURBING A CREATURE LIKE
CRASSUS COULD BE.



IT WAS SOMETHING
MORE THAN SIMPLE
UGLINESS. IT HAD
TO DO WITH RAGE.

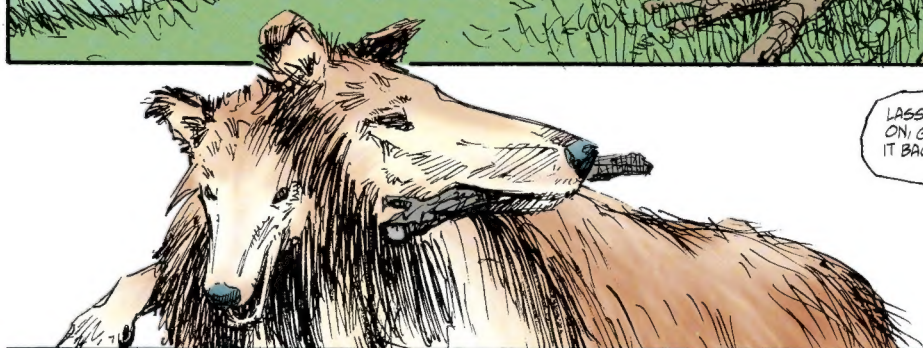
AND THE ONLY
THING I KNOW
FOR SURE
ABOUT RAGE...



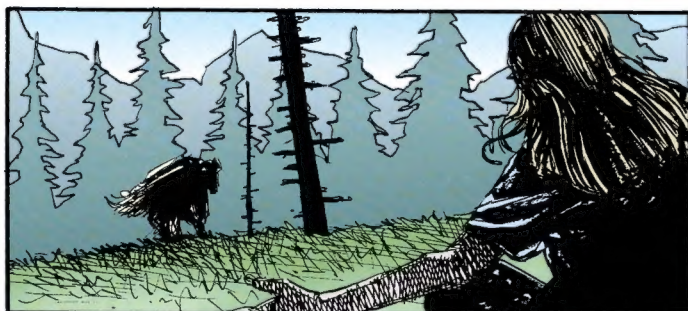
...IS THAT IT IS WHOLLY UNPREDICTABLE.



SCYLLA!

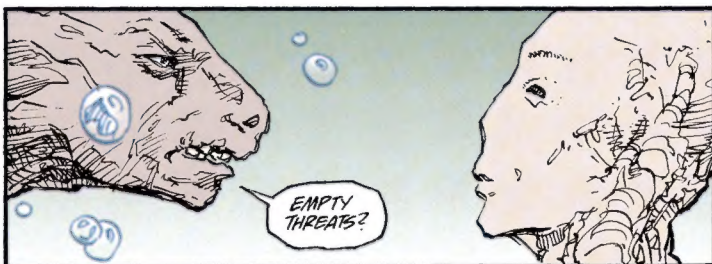
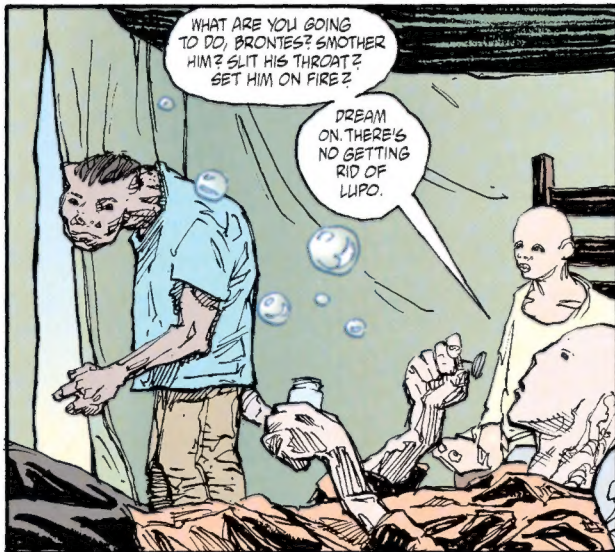


LASSIES! COME ON! GIRLS, BRING IT BACK. COME ON....!



GOOD GIRLS, LASSIES! JOHHHHHHH, GOOD, GOOD GIRLS!!!







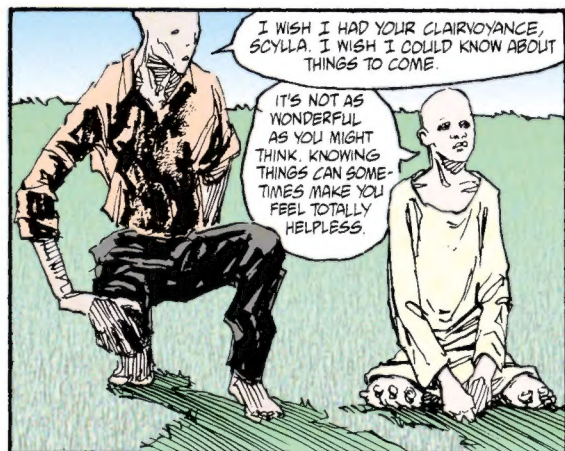
YOU'VE GOT TO STOP
BAITING BRONTES, DAEDALUS.
THERE'S TOO MUCH AT
STAKE RIGHT NOW.

YEAH, YEAH. SOME-
ONE'S COMING, RIGHT?
YOU TOLD US THAT A WEEK
AGO, AND NO ONE'S
SHOWN UP YET.



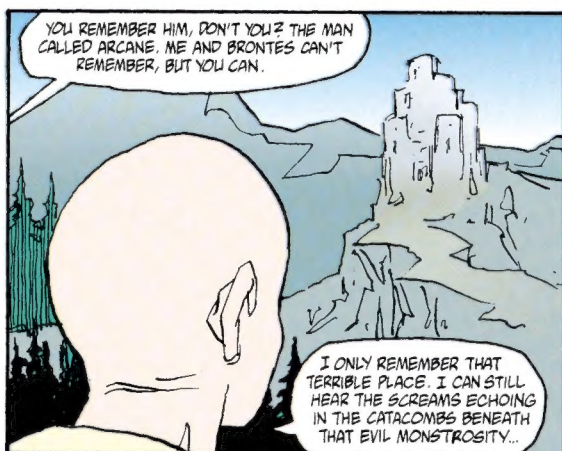
BE
PATIENT.

WHO WOULD WANT TO
FIND *US*, ANYWAY?



I WISH I HAD YOUR CLAIRVOYANCE,
SCYLLA. I WISH I COULD KNOW ABOUT
THINGS TO COME.

IT'S NOT AS
WONDERFUL
AS YOU MIGHT
THINK. KNOWING
THINGS CAN SOME-
TIMES MAKE YOU
FEEL TOTALLY
HELPLESS.



YOU REMEMBER HIM, DON'T YOU? THE MAN
CALLED ARCANÉ, ME AND BRONTES CAN'T
REMEMBER, BUT YOU CAN.

I ONLY REMEMBER THAT
TERRIBLE PLACE. I CAN STILL
HEAR THE SCREAMS ECHOING
IN THE CATACOMBS BENEATH
THAT EVIL MONSTROSITY...



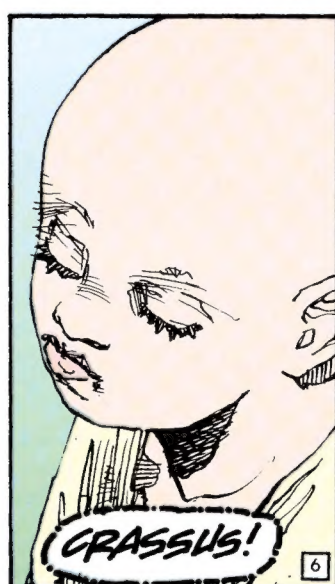
BUT THERE'S
NOTHING I CAN
DO TO QUIET
THEM.

ARCANÉ... HE'S
NOT COMING BACK,
IS HE? IT'S NOT HIS
VOICE YOU HEAR
...IS IT?



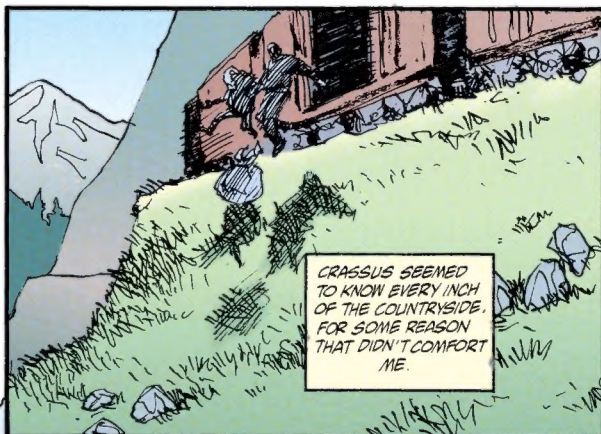
NOT
ARCANÉ.
ONE LIKE
US.

AND ONE
LIKE NOTHING
THIS WORLD
HAS EVER
KNOWN.



GRASSUS!

WE WERE IN ROMANIA WHEN MY FEVER FINALLY BROKE; TRAVELLING THROUGH THE CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS ON OUR WAY TO TRANSYLVANIA.



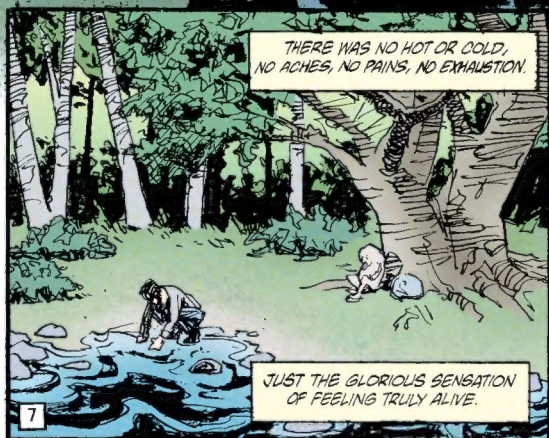
GRASSUS SEEMED TO KNOW EVERY INCH OF THE COUNTRYSIDE. FOR SOME REASON THAT DIDN'T COMFORT ME



MY BODY WAS HARDENING, AND MY NERVOUS SYSTEM TINGLED WITH A BRILLIANT NEW ENERGY.

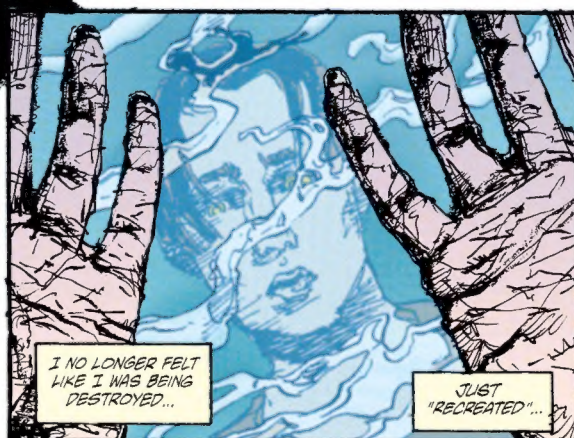


THE PAIN WAS GONE, FOR NOW, AND THE BLOOD COURSED THROUGH MY VEINS LIKE URANIUM.



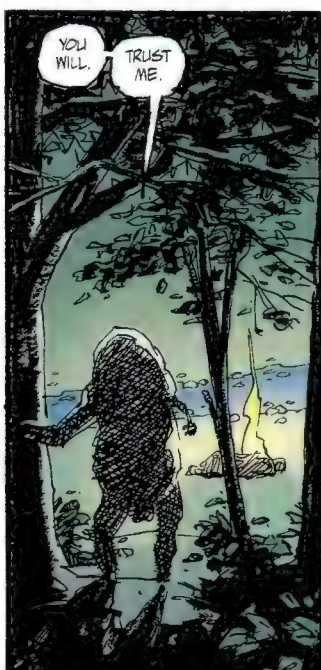
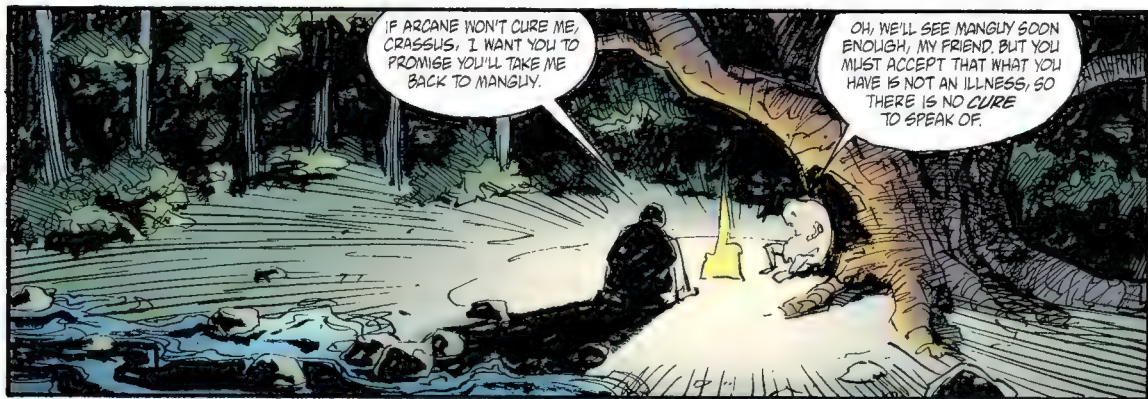
THERE WAS NO HOT OR COLD, NO ACES, NO PAINS, NO EXHAUSTION.

JUST THE GLORIOUS SENSATION OF FEELING TRULY ALIVE.



I NO LONGER FELT LIKE I WAS BEING DESTROYED...

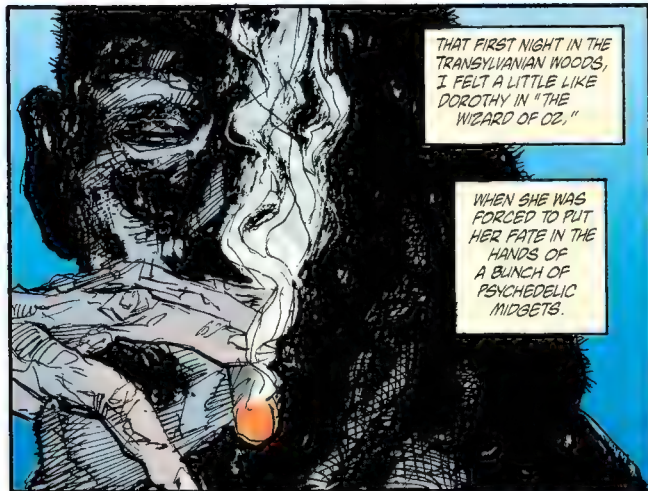
JUST "RECREATED"...





"TRUST ME." TWO OF THE MOST FRIGHTENING WORDS EVER BROUGHT TOGETHER...

ALONG THE SAME LINES AS "HANDS UP!", OR "LOOK OUT!"

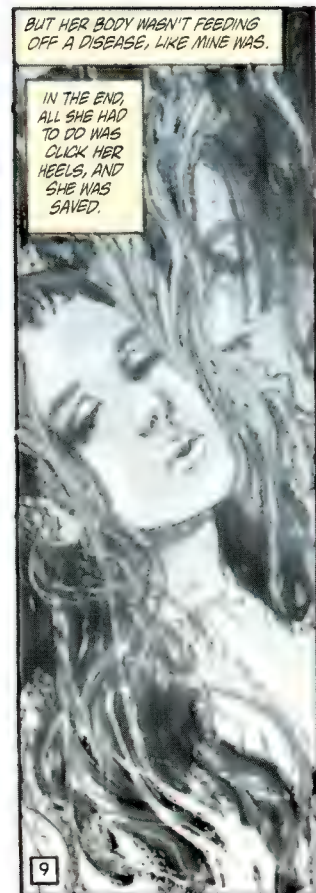


THAT FIRST NIGHT IN THE TRANSYLVANIAN WOODS, I FELT A LITTLE LIKE DOROTHY IN "THE WIZARD OF OZ,"

WHEN SHE WAS FORCED TO PUT HER FATE IN THE HANDS OF A BUNCH OF PSYCHEDELIC MIDSETS.

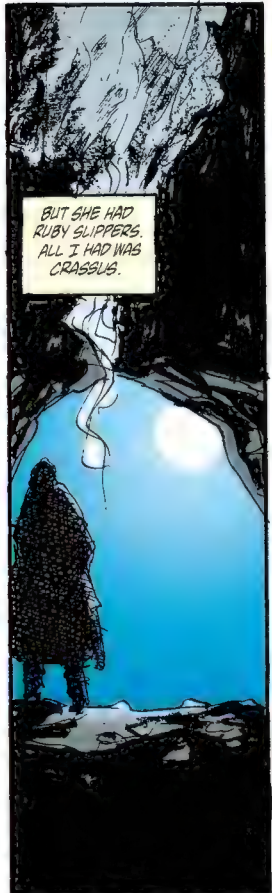


SHE TRUSTED, AND SHE FOUND THE WIZARD.

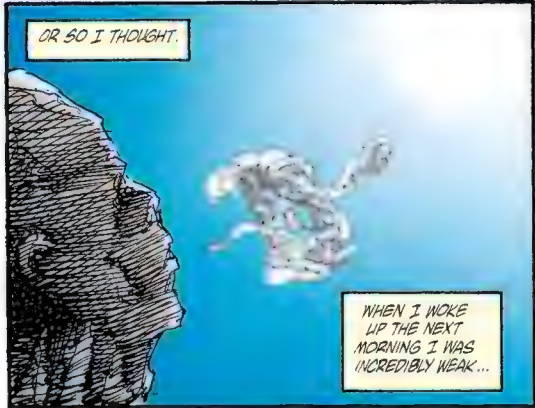


BUT HER BODY WASN'T FEEDING OFF A DISEASE, LIKE MINE WAS.

IN THE END, ALL SHE HAD TO DO WAS CLICK HER HEELS, AND SHE WAS SAVED.



BUT SHE HAD RUBY SLIPPERS. ALL I HAD WAS CRASSUS.

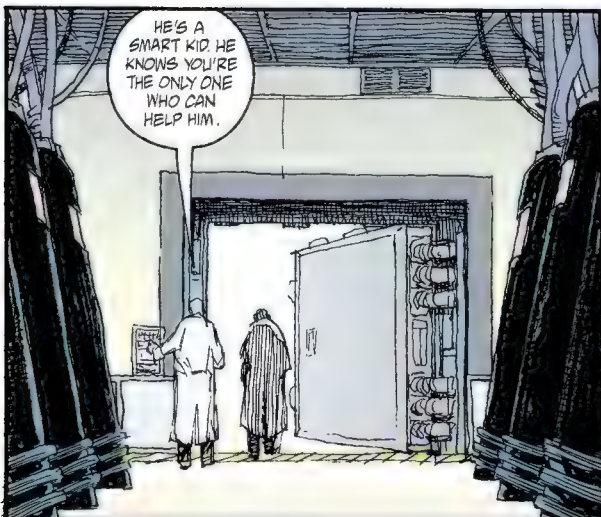


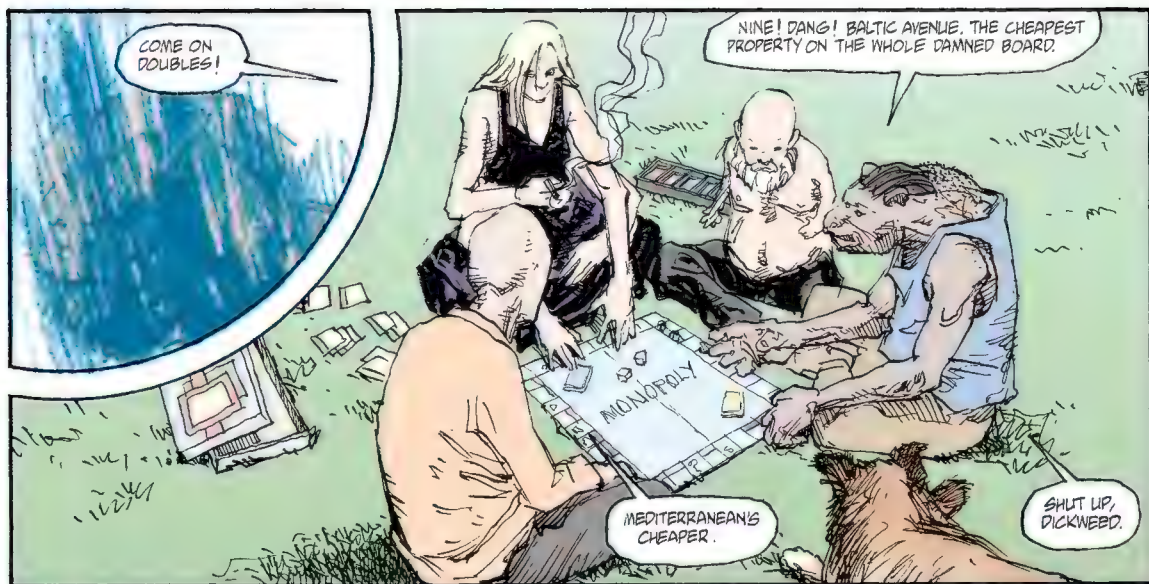
OR SO I THOUGHT.

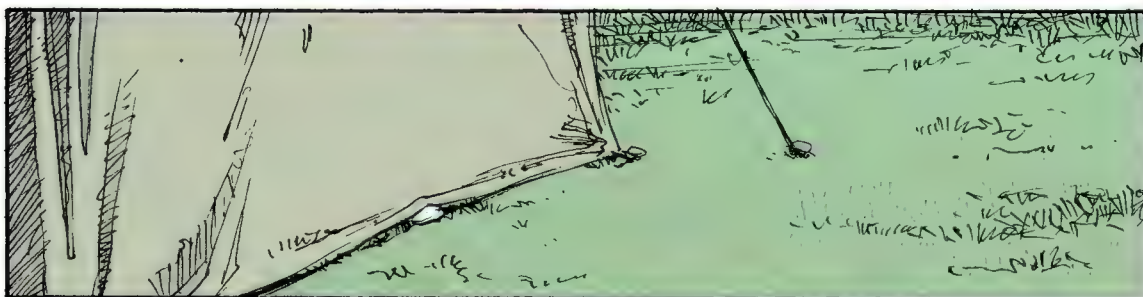
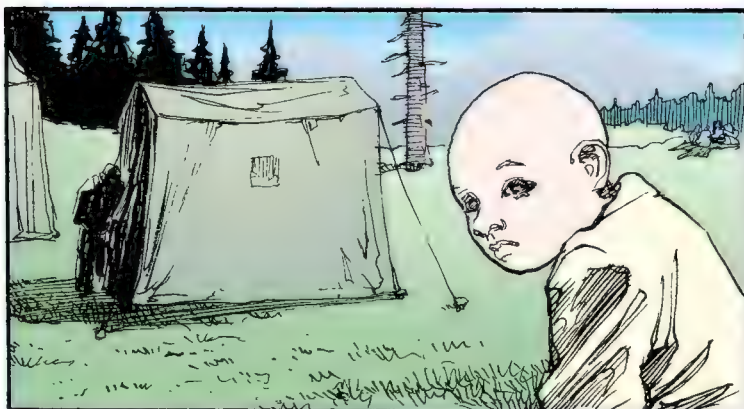
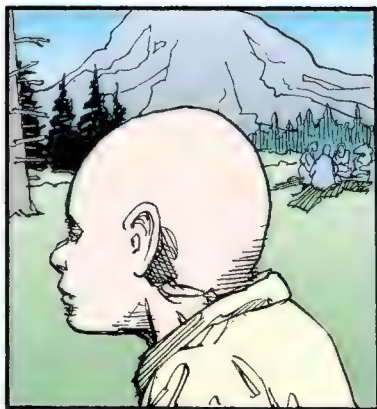
WHEN I WOKE UP THE NEXT MORNING I WAS INCREDIBLY WEAK...

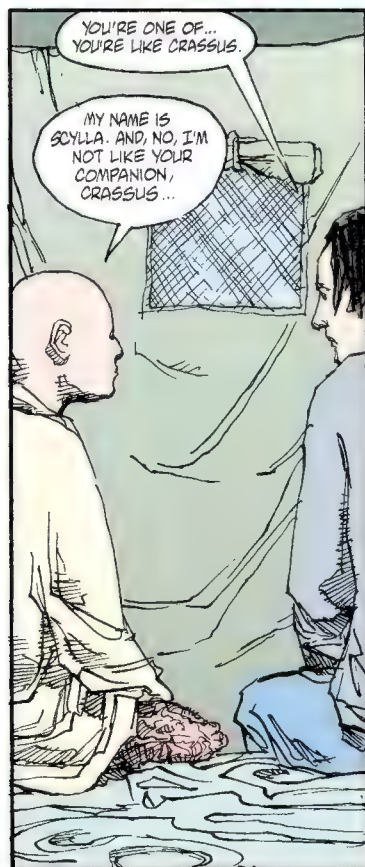
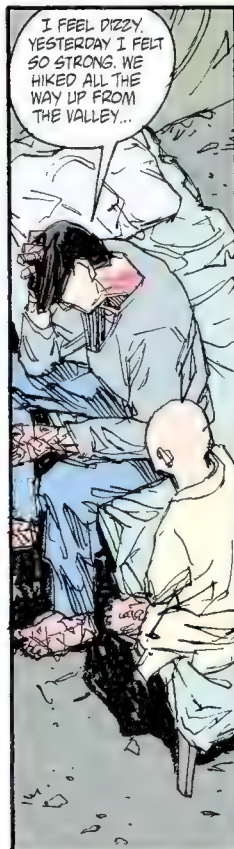
...AND VERY MUCH ALONE.

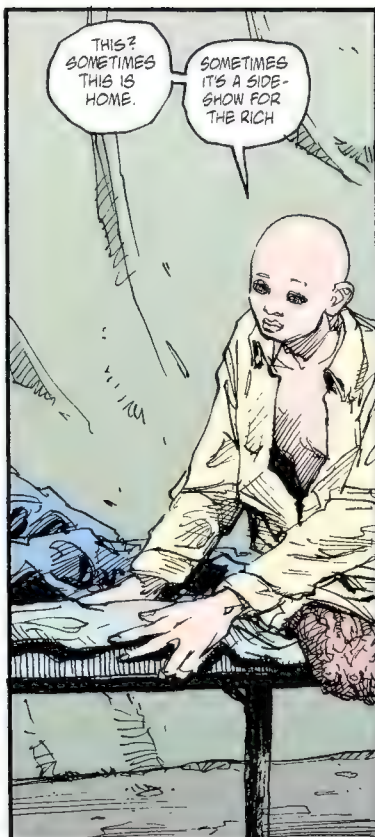


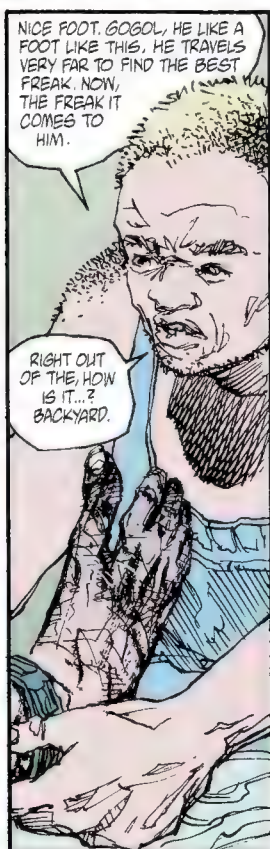
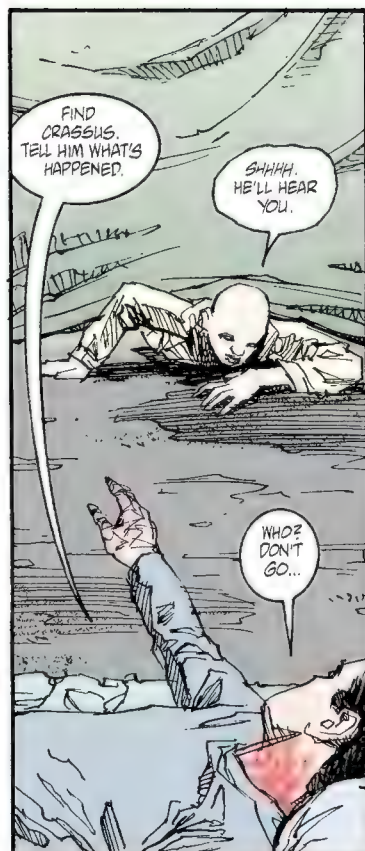






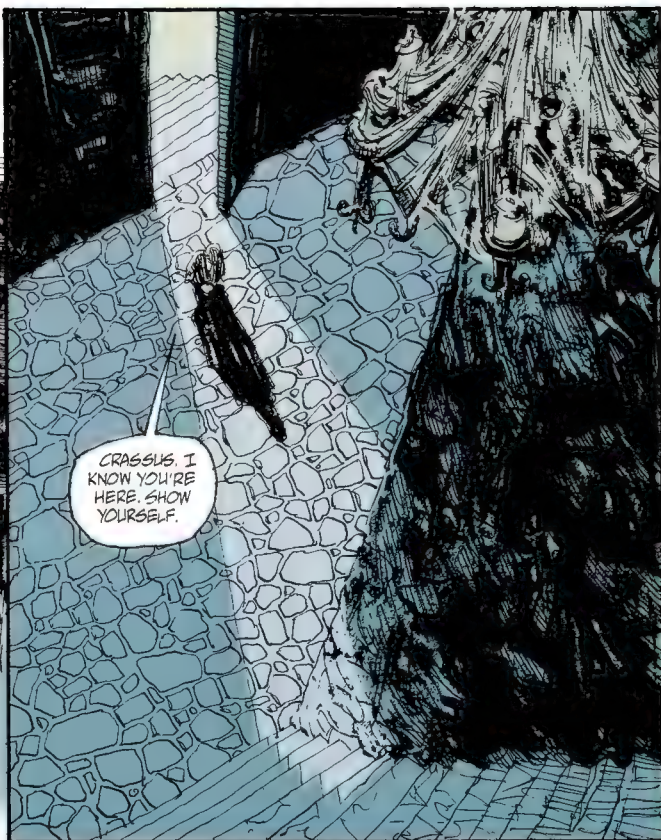








CRASSUS.



CRASSUS. I
KNOW YOU'RE
HERE. SHOW
YOURSELF.



I ASSUME
DAMIEN IS IN
YOUR CAMP
NOW.

YOU KNOW
HE IS. WHY DID
YOU ALLOW IT?

HE'S
SAFER
THERE.

NONE
OF US ARE
SAFE.



AND WHY DID YOU TELL
HIM ARCANÉ WAS HERE?
YOU KNOW HE LEFT
AGES AGO.

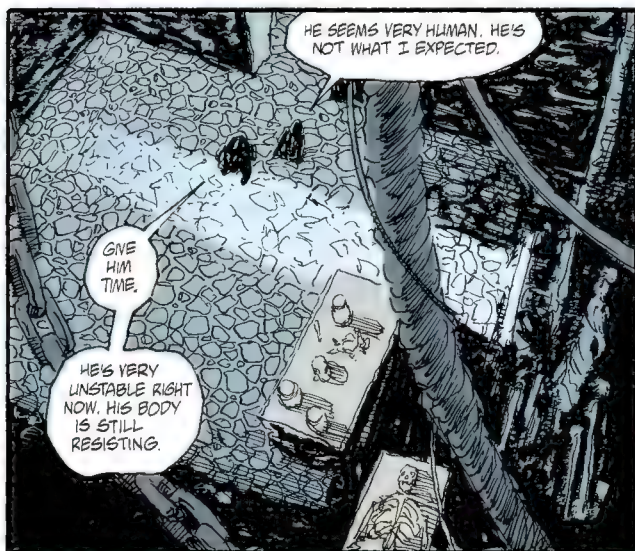
HE WOULDN'T HAVE
COME OTHERWISE. HE THINKS
ARCANÉ IS HIS ONLY HOPE.

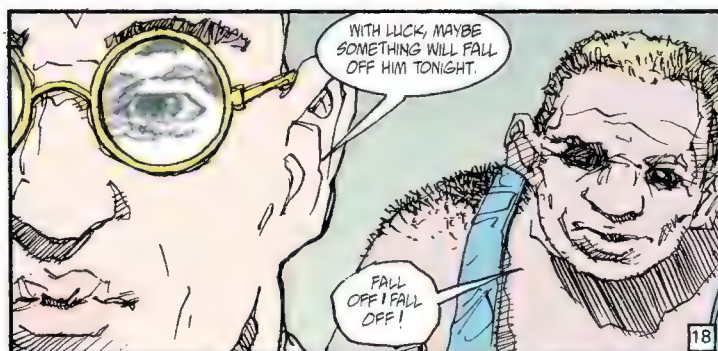
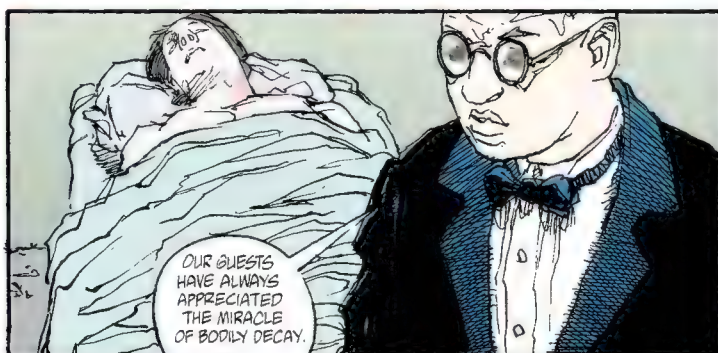
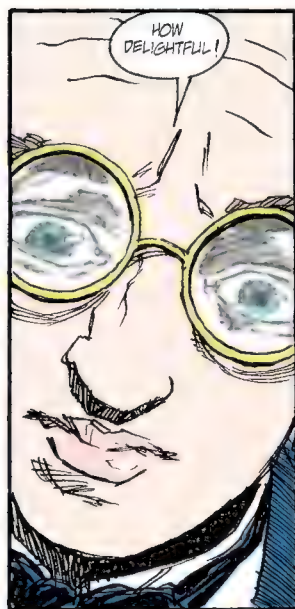


HOPE?
HOPE FOR
WHAT?



HE THINKS
HE'S
HUMAN.



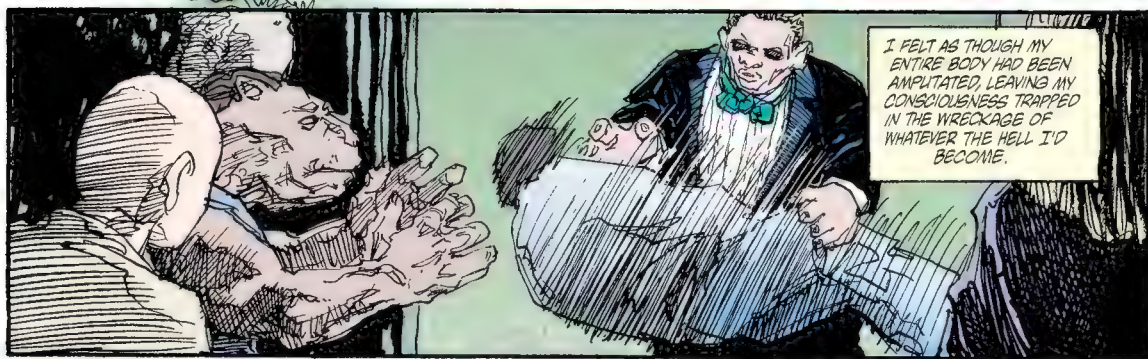


THEY SAY THAT MEN WHO'VE LOST ARMS
AND LEGS WILL SOMETIMES SCRATCH AT
AN ITCH ON A LIMB THAT'S NOT THERE.



IT'S
CALLED
"PHANTOM
PAIN."

THEY REALIZE, EVEN AS THEY
REACH, THAT THERE'S NOTHING
LEFT TO TOUCH. BUT THEY
REACH ANYWAY, REMEMBERING
HOW IT USED TO BE.



I FELT AS THOUGH MY
ENTIRE BODY HAD BEEN
AMPUTATED, LEAVING MY
CONSCIOUSNESS TRAPPED
IN THE WRECKAGE OF
WHATEVER THE HELL I'D
BECOME.

I LAMELY TRIED TO CONVINCE
MYSELF IT WASN'T ME WHO WAS
CHANGING, BUT EVERYONE ELSE.

RIGHT.



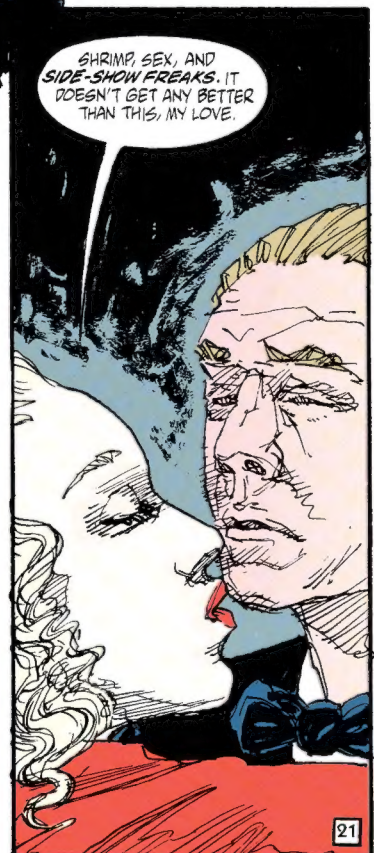
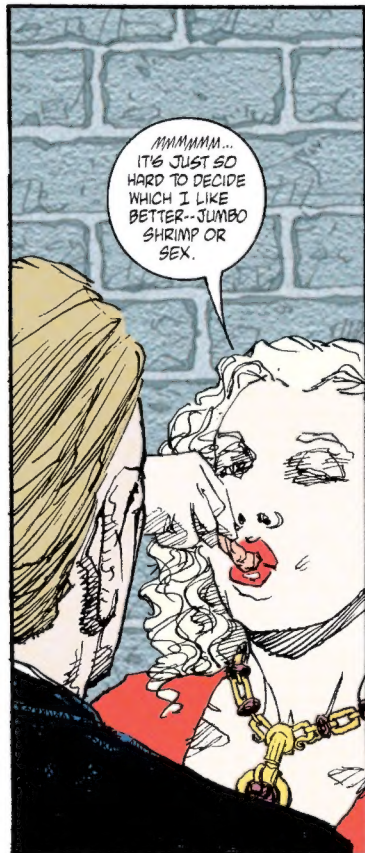
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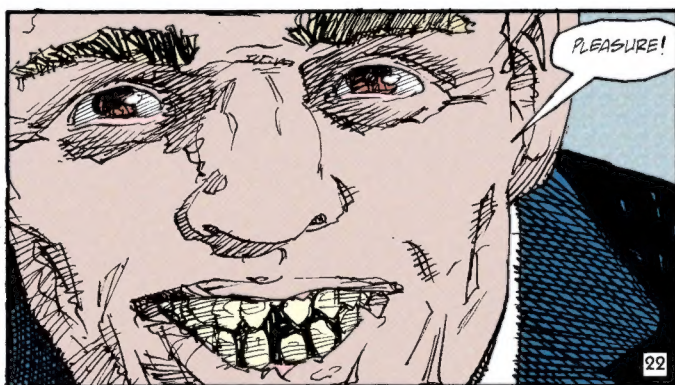
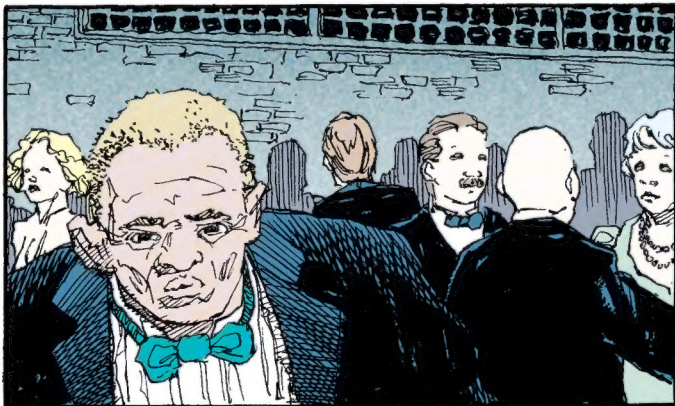
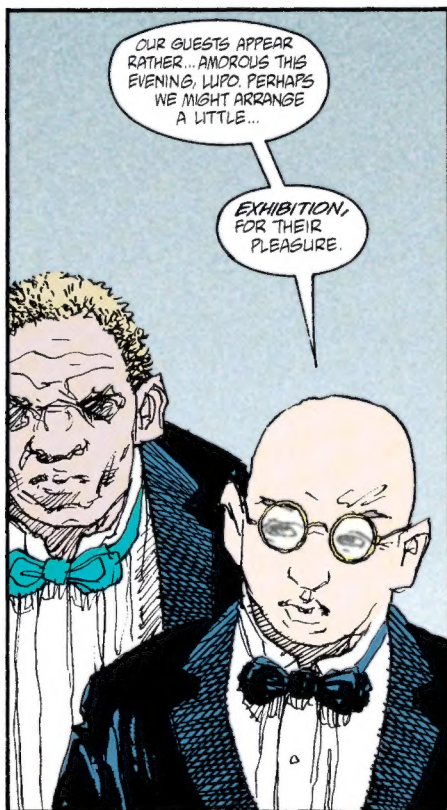


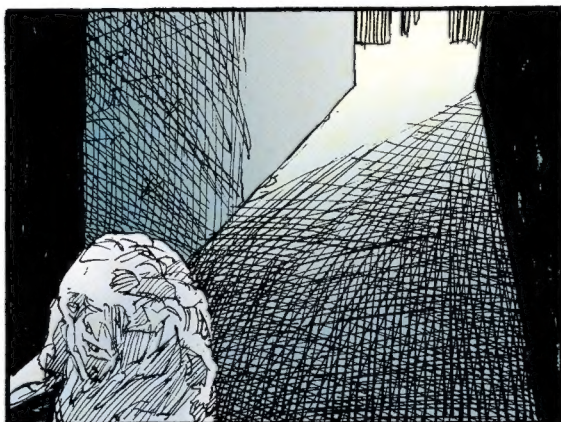
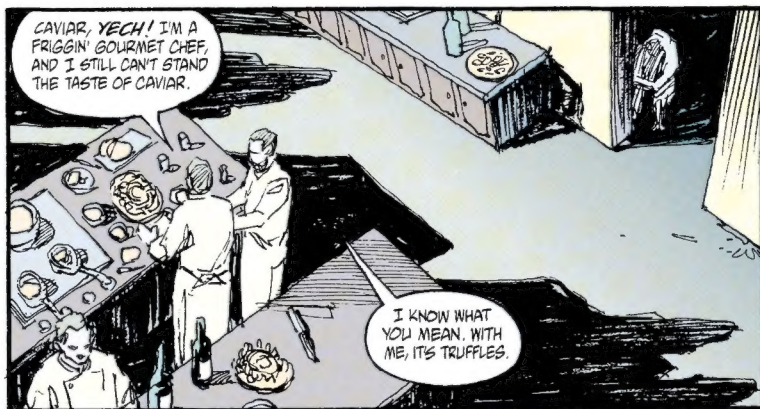
IF THE PHANTOMS WERE LISTENING, I'M
SURE THEY HAD A PRETTY GOOD LAUGH.













ALL I
FEEL IS
BETRAYED.

ALL I
WANT IS
TO DIE.

DEATH
BRINGS NO
SALVATION.
LISTEN TO THE
VOICES.



LET THEIR
ANGER BE
YOUR OWN.



FOR
BETTER
OR FOR
WORSE,
DANIEL...

YOU'VE BEEN
CHOSEN TO
DELIVER US
FROM THIS
NIGHTMARE.



IT'S TIME,
MY FRIEND.

IT'S
TIME.

NEXT: THE PRODIGAL SON